



PRESS RELEASE

Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigation *Chief Richard Weber*

Date: March 24, 2016

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IRS – Criminal Investigation

CI Release #: CI-2016-03-24-B

Louisiana Check Cashers Plead Guilty to Conspiracy, Tax Charges and Agree to Forfeit \$4.12 Million

Two residents of Kenner, Louisiana, pleaded guilty today before Federal District Court Judge Lance M. Africk of the Eastern District of Louisiana for crimes related to the operation of their check cashing business, VJ Discount Inc., announced Acting Assistant Attorney General Caroline D. Ciralo of the Department of Justice's Tax Division and U.S. Attorney Kenneth A. Polite for the Eastern District of Louisiana.

Susantha Wijetunge, aka VJ, 52, pleaded guilty to conspiring to defraud the United States by impeding and impairing the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), to file false reports with government agencies regarding these transactions and to commit mail and wire fraud. His spouse, Manula Wijetunge, aka Manu, 48, pleaded guilty to willfully filing a false tax return. As part of their guilty pleas, the defendants and certain corporate entities they control agreed to the forfeiture of approximately \$4.12 million dollars.

According to publicly filed documents, defendants Susantha Wijetunge and Manula Wijetunge owned VJ Discount Inc., a Louisiana corporation that operated a convenience store and check cashing business in Kenner. Susantha Wijetunge, VJ Discount Inc. and others cashed fraudulently obtained tax refund checks for multiple co-conspirators, for which they charged a higher fee than normal. Often, these transactions involved multiple checks and tens of thousands of dollars. In order to conceal this illegal activity, Susantha Wijetunge and others filed false reports with the government, or failed to file them as required by law.

Susantha Wijetunge also admitted to filing multiple false tax returns that underreported business and individual income to the IRS. Both Susantha Wijetunge and Manula Wijetunge admitted that VJ Discount Inc. had third party check deposits of more than \$59 million in 2011; \$47 million in 2012; and \$66 million in 2013. Despite this large volume of business, the defendants' individual income tax returns reported total individual income of less than \$100,000 per year. Manula Wijetunge pleaded guilty to willfully filing a false 2013 individual income tax return.

Susantha Wijetunge faces a statutory maximum term of five years in prison and Manula Wijetunge faces a statutory maximum term of three years in prison. They also face fines, forfeiture, the costs of prosecution and restitution. Sentencing is set for July 14.

Acting Assistant Attorney General Ciralo and U. S. Attorney Polite commended special agents of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations and IRS-Criminal Investigation, who investigated the case and Assistant U.S. Attorneys Hayden Brockett and David Haller and Trial Attorney Michael Hatzimichalis of the Tax Division, who are prosecuting the case.

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